

Come Inside, It's Ok by [petersfeather](#)

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Summary:

“It’s not that easy for me, Billy.”

“And you think this shit is easy for me?”

Hop feels bad for sitting here, still listening, but he can’t get his muscles or limbs to move him. He feels stuck, somewhere between here and the past, picturing all the ways he’s still the same and yet so wildly different.

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Or the one where Hop thinks about his own past and Billy's present and thinks about how similar they really are.



## Come Inside, It's Ok

### Author's Note:

yoooooooo i've got other things i desperately need to finish but uhhhh.... this was mostly finished and i wanted to write something slightly angsty and also about Billy and Steve closer to the start of their relationship.

this is based on the song [Thirteen - Big Star](#) which i was listening to one day and it immediately made me think of young Jim and young Joyce navigating their friendship/relationship when they were teens. i'm a fuckin' *sucker* for young Jim/Joyce and i just don't think there's enough of it. i just love the idea and dynamic of them knowing each other when they were young.

**TW: referenced past child abuse, referenced homophobia, i make every dad in the general area of Hawkins sound like complete and utter abusive assholes and i'm v sorry for that. tbh when i wrote a good chunk of this i was having my own daddy issues sooo???? take that how you will lmao**

(title from Thirteen - Big Star)

James Hopper hated his father more than anyone else hated the man. More than his uncle who had to grow up with the jerk. More than his mother who threatened to divorce the deadbeat seven times. More than *anyone*.

Hopper's father was abrasive and loud. He joined the army because he *wanted to*. He gave up his individuality willingly. He shaved his head and licked the boot of The Man and acted superior for it. He looked down on a young Jimmy Hopper and barked in his face and ordered that he become a man. Quicker. Jim was only 7. He had just broken an arm at football practice. He needed reassurance and

comfort. He got condescension and a mother threatening to leave. Loudly.

James Hopper was sure he was the only son in the world who hated his own father. He felt sure as hell about it when he stuck his jaw out and looked past his nose at his father who always seemed to tower over him. Even when the man only had an inch on him, he was larger- always looming. He felt sure as hell about it when he'd narrow his eyes and refuse to listen. He felt sure as hell about it when he talked back to him, and got into yelling matches with him, and slammed the door on him.

He felt even more sure the one night he got hit.

He was more than certain he was the only one. Standing there, staring this horrible bulk of a man down, Jimmy *knew* no one else had ever felt such a thing before. This wasn't TV or the movies. This wasn't a family love you cherish by the fire on a cold Christmas night. This wasn't a father with kind eyes and a stern voice who comes into the house in the evening with his suit on and his briefcase in hand, kissing his kids and smiling brightly. This was different and he knew it.

And all of that anger and stress and feeling of certainty made him take too long to realize something crucial. Because he didn't realize you can *know* something and yet still be so wrong.

That is, until Phil didn't come to school one day.

Jimmy figured he was sick. A couple days later he figured it was that nasty stomach bug. A week later and he figured his family took a trip. A week and a few days had him itching with worry. He asked his best friend as calmly as he could. That friend looked at him like he was *nuts*.

"You didn't hear?"

"Hear what?"

"He moved away. His mom took him out of the state last weekend. They just left."

Jim couldn't understand the words for a second.

"Why?"

"You didn't know? His dad has been roughing him up for *years* now. He got the mom too, I think. Why do you think he was always wearing sweaters all year long?"

Jim's heart stopped.

"His mom finally got him out. They left."

"Why did no one say anything about it?"

"Because you don't talk about that stuff." Jim's friend said, hushed and knowing, eyes turned solemn and hiding a world Jim didn't know lived in there. In his most outspoken, lively friend. In his friend he'd known since they were toddlers.

*You don't talk about that stuff* he said like he had a whole world of pain to tell. Jim knew his friends were like him- dads who were tough as nails and grunted more than spoke. It was why they all got along so well. But they never mentioned their fathers being... Jim was so sure he was the only one. Everyone else did things with their family. Everyone else seemed so perfect. At the very least they seemed *better*. Jim was *sure*.

*Why did no one say anything about it?* quickly morphed into *Why did I never even ask?*

Starting there, Jim kept a critical eye out. He watched his friends and what they were wearing. The way they moved and the changes in those movements. The words they spoke about their parents. He noticed differences and fluctuating emotions. But still, he was only a young teenager- he never knew what to do. His mouth couldn't form around the words he felt he should say. His brain could barely provide them. So he did for them what he would have liked- just took them out to empty fields and deep into the woods. He provided them beer and music. Sometimes, when they were splitting at the seams, he'd fight them a bit. He'd egg them on so they could fight it out. Get the anger out. *Help*, somehow. Inadvertently. Lord knew Jimmy

sometimes just needed to punch shit. Turns out, his friends felt the same way, and often.

When his daughter Sarah came, he handled her gently and spoke to her even softer. He got into fights with his now ex-wife over his not being strict enough but Hop couldn't find it in himself to have any kind of gruffness toward someone so soft and so innocent and so pure. She was the light of his life. She left so quickly. Even his softness and kindness couldn't save her, and he couldn't very well beat the shit out of her enemies like he had wished to.

And when he met Billy Hargrove on the side of the road that one dark night, having pulled him over for speeding drunkenly down the lonely streets on the outskirts of town, every red flag flew up. Every worry and fear he found within himself when he was a teen found its place once again inside of him for this boy. For his bruised face and exhausted eyes. For his lightly cut chin and short breath. Hop became young Jimmy yet again, analyzing and fearing for a world of pain he couldn't see and couldn't ask about. He searched hard for words this time and found all the wrong ones. He exhausted the poor boy with his inability to articulate his fears and was successful in taking him in only because he had worn him out so badly.

Still, since then, he's been here. He's family now. He's out of there. In all his fumbling Hop did *something* right.

And yet, things still feel wrong. Billy still walks tentatively around him, like the cabin is going to crash down above him and any relationship they've built up is going to shatter.

Hop thinks about it so often. He thinks about Billy and sees his own friends from high school. He sees parts of himself, but sadder, angrier... more helpless. He thinks endlessly on what he can do to fix it.

~*Won't you let me walk you home from school*~

A song starts playing through his record player and he's lost again in the world of Jimmy vs. Billy. He thinks of how life used to feel simple.

This song always whisks him away to high school. The early days when life was confused and wandering and he was just coming into his own with football, not nearly a “star” yet and Joyce... Joyce was young and wide eyed and wandering just the same. By that point she hadn’t even met Lonnie yet. She was awkward and yet still so beautiful. So quiet and so stunning. Her laughter rang through the hallways and he swears he can still hear it.

This song feels like it’s for them. When he first heard it, he saw her face back when they were freshmen and then sophomores, when he used to walk her home. He always used to walk her home, before he got his car and before she got Lonnie. They’d walk so slow, wandering through the streets, lazily strolling past stores and getting slightly distracted by the people zooming past on their bikes.

He sits forward on the couch and he looks down at the tattered carpet and he hears himself as Jimmy.

*”C’mon Joyce... we can hit the pool this weekend.”*

*“I’m busy.”*

*“Then... then maybe Friday I can get a couple tickets for that dance.”*

*“What?”*

He gave her his biggest, brightest grin, knowing he caught her off guard. He smiles a little now at the thought.

*”Yeah, c’mon, Joyce. I’ll take ya. I’ll get a monkey suit and you can wear a dress-”*

She had laughed that bright, ringing laugh. It made him smile every time.

*“Yeah, I think I’ll pass.”*

*“You’re gonna pass up a chance to dance with me?”*

*“Don’t tell me, you’re the best dancer in Hawkins?”*

*“You’ll never know if you don’t come find out.”*

*“You’re really full of yourself, aren’t you?”*

Hop has a hard time thinking of himself back then. He felt so sure of everything. Of himself and what he was doing, even if he knew he didn’t know anything at all. Still, he chuckles now as he sits here, thinking about Joyce’s smile and her little nod. Thinking about him buying those tickets. Thinking about the night they had together, awkward and fumbling but bright still. His first *real* kiss that had real feelings to go along with it. The way Joyce walked so quickly as they headed to her home because she was so nervous. The way she never let him walk her up to her house because she was so scared her parents would ground her.

*Lord* does he remember the fights. The stress and the struggle of dealing with Joyce’s parents. When they came to an after-school event and Jimmy said hi to her and her dad gave her hell for it and her mom worried herself sick for a bit. She got grounded and started avoiding him. He got angry and figured *fine* because Gloria from his History class had been eyeing him up lately and helping him with a pretty *friendly* smile so it didn’t even matter.

It wasn’t more than a week that had passed before he cornered her after school and convinced her to let him walk her home again.

They wandered downtown and he guided her behind a store building, the store she now works for if he remembers correctly, and asked about that night. Asked about what he said wrong. Asked about what he *did* wrong.

She shook her head, said it was just her parents being “crazy, I don’t know”. He couldn’t find it in him to worry that much. When they kissed, it was still with so many feelings attached. Hop can’t remember when those feelings faded.

It wasn’t until a couple years later when a rumor started going around about Joyce’s dad being a grade A asshole like Phil’s was all those years ago that made Jim take her aside very seriously and ask her if she was okay- those couple of years ago and that day. By that point she was with Lonnie and he was getting serious about Diane. He and Joyce hadn’t talked for over a year. Still, he was worried. She insisted that her dad just liked to huff and puff and yell enough to



shake her ears, but he never touched her. It wasn't until years and years later that Hop realized that really isn't any better. Nowadays she insists she was and is fine and he's just found it in himself to believe her.

When Hop finally got a car, they would sit in it and listen to the radio and talk music. She was the only person who'd sit with him and actually think about lyrics and feelings and words. She was always so headstrong about... well *everything* but especially human rights. She wanted equal rights for everyone. She fought so hard it made *Jim* tired. Maybe it started with her father but it truly never seemed to end. They used to sit and theorize about meanings behind words and the messages of songs.

*"Tell your old man what we say about Paint It, Black. That'll mess him up."*

Joyce hit him with a chuckle. That was the last time in high school they really laughed together. He can still remember her laugh back then- light and free from any weight these years have brought to it.

But now Jimmy is Hopper, and life isn't the same. It doesn't wander and linger and hide behind stores for extra kisses that feel electric. He knows life just doesn't work that way anymore. He feels like life has only continued with all of the bad parts and none of the good.

In the slow guitar interlude of the song, he hears voices where they shouldn't be- distant and slightly muffled and outside the window that's opened a bit to let some air in.

"Yeah, he's home. The cruiser is there."

"Then I should go-"

"No, wait-"

It's Billy and another voice Hop thinks he can recognize. Sounds like the same cocky, lilted tone of Steve Harrington. He knows they've been fighting for months now. They always seem to be fighting. Hop used to get called into the school because Billy was always shoving him around that one year. Since then there's been whispers of them

causing a ruckus all over the place but Hop never gets called to check it out. He doesn't like to ask too much about it. He's still trying to handle Billy gently and there's so many more things to worry about. He doesn't have the words to ask about that.

He doesn't have the words to explain why they'd be here, together and clearly not at each other's throats. Why bring a fight all the way back home?

"You uh... got anything planned this weekend?"

"Nope, nothing planned."

A pause.

"There's uh... a stupid *dance* or something."

"Billy-"

"Look I just... we can't go, obviously but maybe... we can do something on our own?"

There's another pause. Longer this time. Hop used to be so sure and suddenly he's realizing yet again maybe things are the same as they were when he was young- because yet again, he doesn't know anything.

~*Won't you tell me what you're thinking of*~

"C'mon Harrington...." there's the confirmation Hop didn't need. "Say *something* at least. Don't just stand there thinking."

"Billy we can't keep running around and hiding."

"Why not?"

~*Would you be an outlaw for my love?*~

"What if people find *out*, that's why not! What if my dad-"

"Tell your dad to fuck off."

"And Hop?"

Hop's heart stops. Everything comes crashing to a halt because suddenly he's being made to face the very harsh fact that he's not Jimmy anymore. He hasn't been for a long while. He's Chief Hopper and Chief Hopper belongs to the "other" part of these young kids' minds. Billy's and Steve's and El's and Mike's. He's the man they're meant to rebel against. He's the one that doesn't "get it" like they do.

And apparently he's the one that Steve is worried about.

He doesn't blame him. He doesn't even know what to *think*. He knows people like that exist. He thinks he used to go to school with a few guys who were... well, into *other* things. He never had much to say or even think about it. Joyce was friends with them. She went out to a protest or something once in their senior year. He saw her in a car with them while he was taking Diane to the movies.

It's not the fact that they like each other or that they want to spend time together. That's better than them beating the snot out of each other and getting his guys called on them. It's the fact that they're worried about *him* and the fact that they have every reason to be. Hop is part of "The Man" now, and people around here don't exactly like differences.

"I'll figure it out." Billy says, but Hop almost misses it, it's so quiet.

"Billy-

"Are you gonna fight for this, or what? Or is this just a one time thing for you to *find yourself* or some bullshit?"

Hop hears Jimmy in Billy's words

*"Are you not gonna fight for me?"*

*"Fight for you?!"* Joyce had yelled. Oh, how she yelled. *"Are you serious? I... I pick and choose my fights Jim, okay? I have to."*

*"That's not very fair to me."*

*"Not fair? No shit it's not fair, it's not fair for me either! And you... you're not being fair to me, y'know!"*

And that was it. They went separate ways. It's so vivid in Jim's mind- the way she stormed away and Jim drove himself home. He doesn't remember how long it took until Lonnie joined Joyce's picture, but it felt too soon in Hop's ever bitter mind. He couldn't look at her for weeks. He shoved Lonnie in the hallway any chance he got. The kid would snarl and sneer at him, but he was as scrappy as a dog and scrawnier than a toothpick- no way did he ever pick a fight. He spat words and Jimmy lunged and that was that. Hop doesn't remember when the feelings faded, but he knows he never stopped hating Lonnie's stupid face.

Then he started to date Diane and things were just... over.

"Alright Steve, I see."

"It's not that easy for me, Billy."

"And you think this shit is easy for me?"

Hop feels bad for sitting here, still listening, but he can't get his muscles or limbs to move him. He feels stuck, somewhere between here and the past, picturing all the ways he's still the same and yet so wildly different.

"Well it is different for you."

"Just because my shit's different doesn't mean my shit's better. Shit is still *shit*, Steve."

*All the times Hop thought he had it the worst anyone could ever possibly have it.*

*"You don't know what it's like."*

*"Try me, Harrington! Just try me."*

*All the times Hop thought maybe his friends were exaggerating about Phil's past. Maybe Joyce was being dramatic about things at home. There was no way a kid could feel so threatened. Not a kid as big as Phil. Not a kid as headstrong as Joyce.*

*There's a longer pause from the two outside the window. The voice that*

*comes is quieter now.*

*"It's scary Billy."*

*"I know it is! I... fuck I know it is."*

*Not a kid as big and headstrong as Billy. It took years for Hop to believe it could happen and still, with an example living in his own house, it's still hard to understand.*

*"Don't you think it could be worth it?" That's Billy's voice. Hop feels his heart sink even deeper. They're talking like they're going to die if they're caught. How many more times can he tell this boy he's safe here? What does he have to do to convince him? To convince them both?*

*"Maybe... I think so."*

*"Look, I can't make you do anything, Steve. But if you wanna try... then let me know, alright?"*

*Billy sounds so tired. Hop wants to tell him to lay down and take a nap. There's such a long pause that follows and fills the space between them.*

*And then suddenly there's something blocking the sun from the window. Jim gets the wherewithal to turn and see that the two boys have got their hands tangled in the front of each other's shirts, just like they would if they were gearing for a fight, but instead of fists flyings it's their lips locked- worlds of frustration still heavy on their brows.*

*Jim wants to protect these kids until the day he dies. They're here and they're wandering too, but their walk home is covered in speed bumps and potholes and hell maybe even spikes that he and Joyce never knew. Whatever he can do to give these kids the time and place to wander like the kids they are, he'll do it.*

*Then they separate, their breathing clearly labored and mingling. Then they turn and see Jim in the window, caught like two deers in big bright headlights.*

*A split second later, Steve is running for the hills and Billy is left with his fists grasping at the air. Hop can't help but laugh.*

## Author's Note:

if you wanna know what happens after this- Billy immediately gives up on the "i can't force you to do anything" and instead yells after Steve to come back and fight for him. then Hop comes outside and gives Billy the biggest, tightest bear hug imaginable and tries to ensure him that it doesn't matter who he likes bc he'll always have a safe place here. if Billy cries.... well he wildly denies it over Hop's chuckles. Eventually, Hop gives the same "you'll always be safe here" speech to Steve.... when they finally catch him.

i'm on tumblr and sometimes i even post things@okaybutlikeimagine

okiedoke, i'm sending so much love and i hope y'all are well. ♥ thanks sm for reading and i adore your soul ♥